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ABSTRACT

Individualized instructional contracts are described as a useful approach to increasing on-task behaviors of mildly handicapped students in the regular classroom. Their step-by-step design and implementation are outlined. A blank contract form and sample contract of activities are provided. (Author/JW)

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Behavior Management through Curricula Modification

Susan P. Waldrop

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ABSTRACT

Individualized instructional contracts increase on-task behaviors in mildly handicapped children in the regular classroom and can be adapted easily to the needs of both student and teacher.

BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT THROUGH CURRICULAR MODIFICATION

The mildly handicapped learner in Arkansas may be placed in one of a variety of settings because the continuum of public school services ranges from regular classroom integration with one period per day in the resource room to a self-contained environment with extremely limited mainstreaming. Despite the accuracy of placement and the appropriateness of programming, many mildly handicapped students are frequently distracted and easily discouraged. Their characteristic lack of intrinsic motivation often leads to numerous off-task problems.

These problems can be addressed effectively through individualized instruction, which, as Godfrey (1) states, provides materials to meet the unique needs of all students and a means of evaluating progress. One system which is successful in meeting individual needs and in increasing on-task behaviors is the individualized instructional contract. Regular and special educators and parents have found that when children with mild handicapping conditions are actively involved in individualized, purposeful learning, they acquire many skills and exhibit a minimal number of off-task behaviors.

Teachers and parents must provide organization, resources (materials), management, the matching of the task with the learner (2), and positive behavior reinforcement. The individualized contract system, implemented according to the following guidelines, meets these criteria:

1. Based on diagnostic screening and educational assessments, the basic skill areas needed are determined and the IEP is written or the individual lesson plan developed.
2. Materials are inventoried, grouped, and sequenced according to subject area. Each grouping is designated as a center and assigned a specific color.
3. Each contract consists of a sheet of paper divided into 12-20 sections or boxes. This skeletal contract form is drawn on a ditto master from which copies are made (see Figure 1).
4. Each box contains an activity, using interesting, motivating materials geared to the student's level of functioning.
5. The contract, usually written in pencil, is stapled to the front of the regular file folder with the student's name written plainly at the top (see Figure 2).
6. The student is monitored as s/he works the activity in each box. Instruction is provided as it is needed.
7. Upon its completion, the activity is checked for accuracy. If the teacher or aide is unavailable, a method is provided to permit the learner to indicate that the task is finished. The completed activity is left in a place where it will be undisturbed, and the student proceeds to the next box.

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8. Each box is marked through with a large "X" after being checked for accuracy. The learner then continues to the next lower box.

9. Positive social reinforcement is always provided after each box/task completion. A token economy system can be easily established and used in conjunction with the contract system.

10. Records are kept with various forms of data collection:

    a) An individual record, stapled to the back of each contract folder
    b) Record books, grade books, or teacher-made pamphlets
    c) The contract itself, recording within each box the number or percentage of correct responses and dated.

11. Upon completion, contracts are replaced, with changes, additions, or deletions as needed.

12. Informal assessments are made periodically to determine individual progress.

13. When objectives for determined skill areas are completed, the date is entered on the I.E.P. or lesson plan.

The contract itself is highly structured. The activities are written into the contract form according to the active/passive method of instruction. This method alternates stimulating, lively learning with quiet, less exciting activities. If one activity lacks appeal or is difficult for the learner, the next box should include something s/he enjoys, e.g., a Tutorette lesson on Fun with Words. After a paperwork activity, the student should be given an opportunity whenever possible to work with more exciting materials.

Two boxes on a contract should specify "free time," usually 10 minutes of independent activity measured by a kitchen timer, during which the student should be allowed to use anything in the room that does not disturb others. Free time ends when the bell on the timer rings.

The primary purpose of the contract system is to encourage student independence through easy material retrieval. Because reading problems occur frequently in mildly handicapped children, independence is more difficult to achieve. In this case, color coding or a similar device is essential for success. For example, underlining on the contract the name of the center with the color corresponding to the center label will enable the learner to find his/her way to those materials. A form of hieroglyphics and symbols, along with numbers and/or letters, can then be used to identify a particular activity. In this way, student success is far greater, and frustration is limited or avoided.

Contracts are not intended to be used haphazardly. The student is not allowed to skip a box unless the specific activity needed is being used elsewhere.

Learners do not waste time hunting uselessly for materials because all worksheets or activity papers are stored in individual folders to which the students have ready access. Each child is responsible for his/her contract so that materials and/or papers are not lost because of carelessness.

Although initially the contract system requires much of the teacher's time in planning, it encourages the development of a well-organized classroom, whether regular, resource, or self-contained. The individual learner acquires skills virtually on a one-to-one basis, with each student receiving the amount of attention and instruction s/he needs--no more, no less.

Two Personnel Preparation projects (teacher and parent training programs) of Focus, Inc., have used contracts as an instructional tool. In one rural Arkansas school district, the resource room teacher and two second-grade regular classroom teachers have utilized contracts in conjunction with a model parent training program. The teachers determine skill areas and include them in contract boxes. Several skills are then taught at home by parents familiar with the contract system. The Focus trainers serve primarily as liaisons between school and home, assisting in materials preparation and in writing initial objectives. The parents find the program more beneficial than helping with "homework" and enjoy the interaction with their children. They also have found that their children stay on-task more readily than with the conventional "homework" method, and the children are pleased to have their parents involved in something they all enjoy.

The individualized instructional contract system is easily adapted to meet the needs of teachers, students, and parents. In both Focus DPP projects, contracts have increased the students' motivation and their on-task behaviors perhaps because the curriculum style permits independence, challenge, and a reinforcing learning experience.

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Figure 1

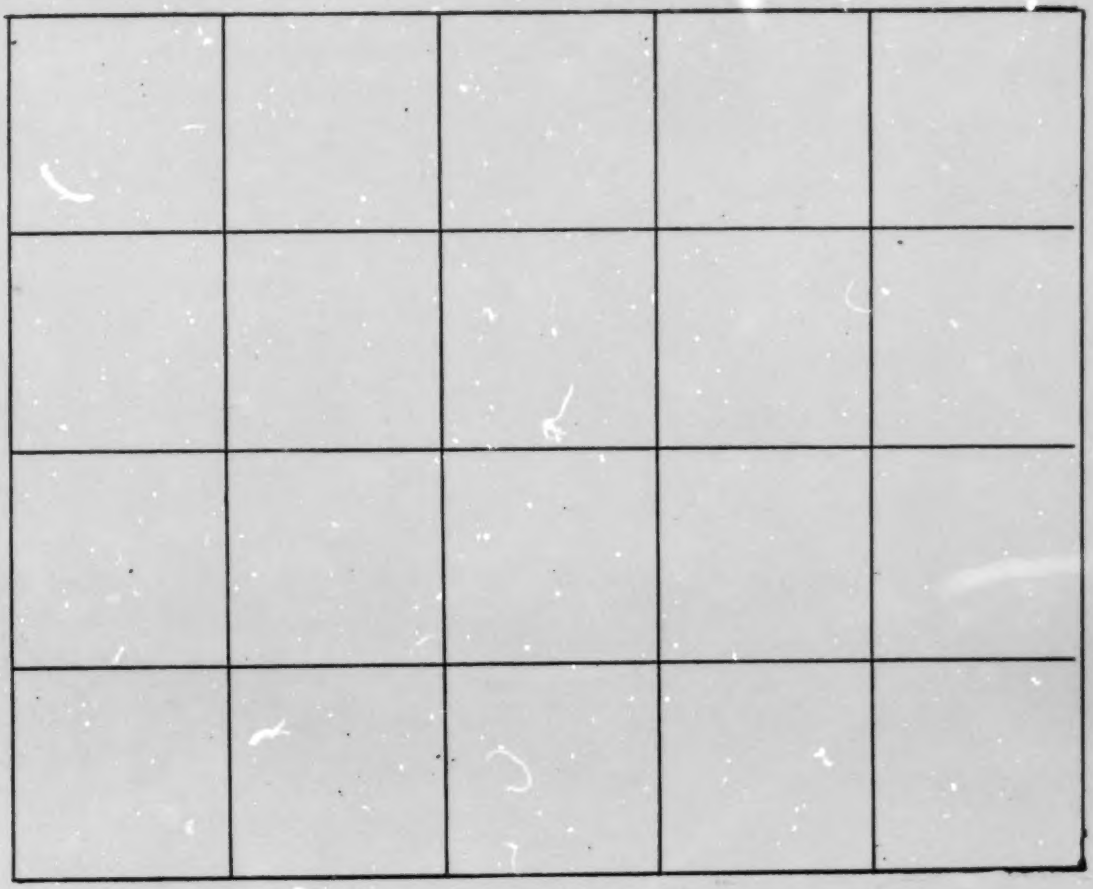

Figure 2

Language Area Cohen C and Task Cards II	Spelling Area Type Cohen C 1-10	Free Time	Spelling Area C.C. 1-10 in alphabetical order	Math Area Fraction wheels 1, 2
Math Area Word Problems Yellow 2	Economics Area Cost Cards 3, 4, 5	Math Area Multiplication Disc 7	Tutorgram 8C Yellow	Tutorette Word Parts 11-20
Math Worksheet 3a	Language Area Write sentences with C.C. 1-10 that asks a ques- tion	Tutorette Word Parts 1-10	Language Area S.R.A. Aqua 6	Spelling Area Quiz--C.C 1-10
A-V Area Dictionary Skills 2	Geography Area Map Skill Cards 6, 7	Language Worksheet nouns/verbs 18	Economics Cost Cards 6, 7, 8	Free Time

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